

## Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

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O 151042Z APR 78  
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0508

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 07813

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS  
TAGS: UR, US, PEPR  
SUBJECT: SOVIET MISPERCEPTIONS ON THE EVE OF THE  
SECRETARY'S VISIT

SUMMARY AND INTRODUCTION: THE EVE OF SECRETARY VANCE'S SECOND TRIP TO MOSCOW SEEMS AN APPROPRIATE TIME TO TAKE NOTE OF SOME DISTURBING TRENDS IN SOVIET ATTITUDE TOWARD THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION AND ITS POLICIES TOWARD THE SOVIET UNION. THE PAST YEAR AND A QUARTER HAS WITNESSED A NUMBER OF UPS AND DOWNS IN THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP, FOLLOWING FOR THE MOST PART THE CURVE OF PROGRESS IN SALT. THE CURRENT MALAISE IN THE RELATIONSHIP, HOWEVER, CONTAINS IN IT MISPERCEPTIONS OF U.S. POLICIES AND INTENTIONS WHICH ARE NEWLY VOICED, IN PUBLIC (AND PRIVATE), BY AUTHORITATIVE SOVIETS FROM BREZHNEV ON DOWN. THESE MISPERCEPTIONS COULD, IF THEY REMAIN UNCORRECTED, LEAD TO INTRANSIGENCE IN THE NEGOTIATION OF SALT AND OTHER ARMS CONTROL AGREEMENTS, AND REINFORCE SOVIET UNILATERAL ACTIVITY IN OTHER AREAS, SUCH AS THE MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA. END SUMMARY AND INTRODUCTION.

1. SINCE THE START OF THE NEW YEAR THERE HAS BEEN AN INCREASINGLY CRITICAL CAMPAIGN IN SOVIET MEDIA AGAINST THE U.S. POLICIES ON SALT, MIDDLE EAST, AFRICA, ERW,

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CSCE AND HUMAN RIGHTS WHICH HAS QUESTIONED THE BASIC INTENTION OF THE ADMINISTRATION TO DEAL WITH THE SOVIET UNION IN GOOD FAITH. THESE PUBLIC COMMENTS HAVE BEEN MATCHED BY PRIVATE REMARKS WHICH REINFORCE THE EMBASSY'S BELIEF THAT THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP MAY INDEED QUESTION THE U.S. LEADERSHIP'S BASIC COMMITMENT TO BETTERING THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP AND ITS ABILITY TO TRANSLATE ESPOUSED

GOALS INTO CONSISTENT POLICY.

2. IT IS EVIDENT THAT THE SOVIETS HAVE NOT MADE AN EASY ADJUSTMENT TO THE CURRENT ADMINISTRATION IN WASHINGTON. THERE IS A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF RESENTMENT TOWARD AN ADMINISTRATION WHICH DOES NOT APPEAR TO GIVE THE SAME PRIORITY TO U.S.-SOVIET RELATIONS AS DID THE PREVIOUS ONE. FURTHERMORE, MOSCOW'S HABITUAL HOSTILITY TOWARD ANY SUGGESTION OF OUTSIDE INTERFERENCE HAS BEEN ACTIVATED BY THE HUMAN RIGHTS POSITION TAKEN BY THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION. THAT THIS POSITION WAS TAKEN FROM THE VERY START AND, FROM THE SOVIET POINT OF VIEW, WITHOUT CONSIDERATION FOR ITS IMPACT ON THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP, ONLY REINFORCES THE RESENTMENT. EVEN IN SALT THE PRESENTATION OF A STARTINGLY NEW APPROACH LAST MARCH WITHOUT FOREWARNING OR CONSULTATIONS PRODUCED A NEGATIVE REACTION AND SUSPICIONS WHICH ARE NOT FULLY ALLAYED TODAY, DESPITE THE SEPTEMBER ACCORDS.

3. RELATED TO THIS IS THE FEELING THAT THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION IS PLAYING POLITICS AT HOME WITH SOVIET-AMERICAN RELATIONS. PART OF THIS IS UNDOUBTEDLY DUE TO THEIR INABILITY TO UNDERSTAND FULLY THE REALITY OF PUBLIC OPINION AND CONGRESSIONAL POWER IN THE POST-WATERGATE, POST-VIETNAM ERA.

4. WHAT HAS BECOME MORE VOCAL, AND MORE IMPORTANT IN RECENT  
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MONTHS, IS THE SOVIET PERCEPTION OF WHAT THEY TERM THE "INCONSISTENCY", AND "VACILLATION" IN AMERICAN POLICY ON THE CENTRAL ISSUES IN THE RELATIONSHIP. THIS THEME WAS PROMINENTLY PLAYED IN BOTH THE ARBATOV PRAVDA ARTICLE AND IN BREZHNEV'S VLADIVOSTOK SPEECH. WE HAVE HEARD THE SAME COMMENTS IN PRIVATE. TO SOME EXTENT THIS IS POSTURING ON THE PART OF THE SOVIETS, BUT TO A SUBSTANTIAL DEGREE IT APPEARS TO REFLECT ACCURATELY THEIR PERCEPTION OF THE SITUATION. WHATEVER THE REALITY IS THE SOVIET PERCEPTION IS WHAT IS IMPORTANT SINCE IT IS THIS LATTER WHICH IS PLAYING A ROLE IN THEIR POLICY TOWARDS US AND WILL PLAY AN INCREASING ROLE UNLESS CORRECTED. MORE IMPORTANTLY IT COULD HAVE A NEGATIVE EFFECT ON THE VISIT HERE OF SECRETARY VANCE.

5. IN THE CONTEXT OF SALT AND THE ARMS CONTROL ARENA WHERE COOPERATION AND MUTUAL COMPROMISE ARE CRUCIAL, A SOVIET PERCEPTION OF THE U.S. AS VACILLATING AND INCONSISTENT SUGGESTS THAT THEY SEE THE ADMINISTRATION AS WEAK AND UNABLE TO CONCLUDE A SALT AGREEMENT BECAUSE OF DOMESTIC COMPROMISES WITH SALT OPPONENTS, OR UNABLE TO OBTAIN RATIFICATION OF A CONCLUDED AGREEMENT BECAUSE OF SENATE OPPOSITION. THE

RESULT MAY BE LESS WILLINGNESS TO COMPROMISE LEST, AS ARBATOV AND BREZHNEV SAID, THEIR FLEXIBILITY BE TAKEN AS A SIGN OF WEAKNESS WITH THE U.S. SIDE DEMANDING MORE CONCESSIONS. TO THE EXTENT THAT THEY PERCEIVE WEAKNESS AND INDECISION THEY WILL, REGARDLESS OF THE TRUE INTENTIONS OF THE ADMINISTRATION, HOLD BACK. IN SUBJECTS WHERE THE DIALOGUE IS NOT FULLY ENGAGED (E.G., CAT) OR NOT ENGAGED AT ALL (E.G., ERW). THE SOVIET PERCEPTION COULD REINFORCE

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RESISTANCE TO SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS AND EXCITE EXPECTATIONS OF GAINING UNILATERAL ADVANTAGE OUTSIDE THE NEGOTIATION PROCESS.

6. CONVERSELY, AND PARADOXICALLY, IN GEOGRAPHICAL AREAS WHERE THE TWO POWERS HAVE FOLLOWED SEPARATE, AND RIVAL POLICIES, AS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA, A SOVIET PERCEPTION OF VACILLATION AND INCONSISTENCY COULD LEAD NOT TO A CONSERVATIVE PULLBACK FROM ENGAGEMENT, BUT A REINFORCEMENT OF THEIR COMMITMENT TO MOVE ALONG THEIR OWN PATH DESPITE U.S. OPPOSITION. HAVING WON THEIR GAMBLE IN ETHIOPIA (AS THEY DID IN ANGOLA), HAVING SEEN THE SADAT INITIATIVES COME TO GRIEF AFTER SO MUCH HOPE RODE ON THEM, THE SOVIETS WOULD NOT BE IN THE MOOD TO COOPERATE WITH US IN EITHER THE MIDDLE EAST OR AFRICA IN ANY CASE. A PERCEPTION OF U.S. VACILLATION AND INCONSISTENCY CAN ONLY REINFORCE THEIR PROCLIVITY TOWARDS UNILATERALISM IN CONCERT WITH THEIR CUBAN ALLIES.

7. CORRECTING THIS SOVIET MISPERCEPTION WILL NOT BE SIMPLE NOR WILL IT BE QUICKLY DONE. A GOOD BEGINNING CAN BE MADE DURING THE VISIT HERE OF SECRETARY VANCE. AT THESE MEETINGS THE MESSAGE GIVEN TO THE SOVIETS SHOULD BE UNEQUIVOCAL, FIRM AND CONSISTANT WITH OUR PAST POSITIONS ON THE ISSUES.

IN SALT WE SHOULD MAKE CLEAR TO THEM WHERE WE STAND AND  
WHAT WE MUST HAVE IN ORDER TO REACH AN AGREEMENT.  
ONCE PRESENTED WE MUST STICK BY IT UNTIL WE GET IT. TOON  
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